



What You Need to Know, What You Need to Do, How to Do It *The Rhino Safety Series of Fact Sheets*

E-Cigarettes In the Workplace

E-cigarettes are proving to be a very popular alternative to the real thing at the moment with many varieties of brand and even different vapour flavourings, with many also using them as a means of stopping smoking tobacco altogether. They are being seen everywhere from our streets and public transport to bars and restaurants, specialist shops have also appeared solely selling these products. The fact that they can be used inside buildings has also appealed to many smokers who do not want to go outside for their cigarette break. The question is how this will affect the health and safety procedures in many workplaces.

E-cigarettes fall outside the scope of smoke free legislation as the act of smoking requires a substance to be burnt, so employers can choose whether to allow employees to smoke them at work or not. With some using them as substitutes for cigarettes as an aid to stop smoking, employers should carefully consider the implications for their own organisations when deciding what to do about E-cigarettes within their workplace could they be encroaching on an employee's personal rights? However employers must also consider the effects on other members of staff as the long term effects of e-cigarettes are unknown, plus having e-cigarette vapours in the workplace may create an unpleasant environment.

Firstly, from an HR point of view can employers essentially stop their employees from smoking at work when the product itself is not governed by the regular legal conventions. Employers should be clear about what their rules on the use of E-cigarettes at work are. If they already have a policy on smoking or one on drugs and alcohol then they could include a paragraph about E-cigarettes in there.

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When introducing new rules, employers should first consult with any recognised union or elected representatives, and they should speak with all employees to make sure they understand what the new rules mean and that they apply to them.

Employers may want to put up signs or notices in the workplace which make it clear where smoking is allowed (if this is the case) and where it is banned. These should include rules for cigarette smokers and rules for E-cigarette smokers.

A further consideration for employers may be whether using e-cigarettes in the workplace fits with the professional image of the organisation and, if permitted, could be seen to "normalise" smoking. Although there is uncertainty about the harmfulness of the vapour employees may, at the very least, find the vapour distracting.

Making Safety Second Nature

From the view of health and safety in the workplace, another factor to be aware of is the risk of fire from using incorrect chargers or over-tightening connections to rechargeable batteries. Indeed, the battery powered electronic versions have been known to explode whilst they are charging! Some versions use USB ports to charge the battery, could this be classed as a breach of the employers IT policy as they are plugged into work computers

Will the cigarettes themselves have to be factored into the premises fire risk assessment as a source of ignition as mentioned previously it has been reported that explosions and fires have occurred as a result of faulty appliances and charger packs, will the device if being used on work premises be governed by the same procedures as other portable electrical and have to be PAT tested.

In terms of health surveillance and occupational health, if employees are permitted to use them in the workplace, will employers have to make medical provision for the testing of their workers who don't smoke for the effects of the second hand smoke inhaled? The effects themselves are currently untested but with the rise in popularity of these devices it may have to be considered in an organisations future health and safety policy. The BMA is certainly supportive of employers implementing policies prohibiting the use of e-cigarettes in their workplaces. From both the users themselves and this second hand smoke viewpoint.

This will always be a controversial subject for the workplace with potential wide ranging issues covering both HR and health and safety needing to be considered in any approach. On thing is for certain this issue is going to become more evident as the products themselves become more of a part of today's society.

For further information or to discuss the specific implications for your business, please contact us at:

info@rhinosafety.co.uk or 01270 440 341.

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